

REMEMBRANCE “RICH AND STRANGE”: ARIEL AND REITERATIVE  
RESISTANCE IN SHAKESPEARE’S *THE TEMPEST*

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## INTRODUCTION

Remembrance runs throughout *The Tempest* in two markedly different and conflicting formations. Both these configurations are directly concerned with questions of subjectivity and alternate modes of conceiving the historical past. The first of these two practices of remembrance is utilized by Prospero throughout the play: asserting remembrance as death, Prospero attempts to petrify the world around him by enforcing a re-memory that recalls a selectively determined picture of the past that strengthens the telos of his futurist project. Ariel disrupts and fragments this project by using reiterative praxis to enforce remembrance as a resistance that brings to light the remains Prospero has discarded in this strategic construction of the past. These omitted shards that Ariel brings back to the fore work to reveal the reality of Prospero's own present violences and the demand for accountability that they open up for him and the future he's imagined as free of any such need to keep the past open. If Prospero utilizes remembrance as a means of simultaneously killing subjectivities and covering over that very violence, Ariel reiterates and ethically transforms this compulsion by remembering instead the forgotten or veiled violences that threaten to unsettle Prospero's claims about the past. By deploying repetition with ethically oriented difference in response to Prospero's commands, Ariel fosters the mobilization of all the inhabitants of the isle. What Ariel ultimately achieves is a reiterative and repersonating ethic that remembers the dead and the past they are a part of in a manner that ensures that the space of ethical accountability remains open and forever mobile.

Before moving on to further delineate the two types of remembrance working throughout *The Tempest* that I aim to identify, it will be useful to outline the particular

valences of the queer ethical praxis I argue Ariel brings to the text. It is an ethic that opposes the mortification and objectification of subjectivities both figuratively and literally dead. These figuratively dead are the socially dead, rigidified within a confined functionality that allows Prospero to use them as he sees fit. The fixity of identity that this social death entails limits the mobility and potentialities of resistance that Ariel's queer theoretical praxis aims to facilitate. The literally dead that are implicated in this ethic are the dead of the past who continuously impel an imperative toward historical accountability. This distinction between the socially and literally dead is not a necessarily fruitful one to make, however, for what is at stake in both is the potentiality of a movement that keeps both identities and history at large permeable and thus in constant play. An insistence on incompleteness and indeterminacy necessitates a deferral of closure that refuses to participate in Prospero's fantasy of eventual finality, choosing instead to render the world in constant flux, suspended in a state of ever-shifting indeterminacy that opens up possibilities for overhaul.<sup>1</sup>

"At this hour / Lies at my mercy all mine enemies" (4.1.59-60), Prospero declares at the close of Act 4: "Shortly shall all my labours end" (4.1.61). Prospero here links the hold he has acquired over his enemies to the completion of his project, and by so doing reveals the necessary link between restraining his challengers and reaching this final closure his plot works toward. Prospero freezes his enemies so that he may freeze his project at large. By enforcing a selective remembrance that recalls debts owed him, Prospero presents a carefully crafted version of the past that seeks to justify his actions so that he will not need to be held accountable for them. As revealed in part by his ongoing preoccupation with the minute machinations of the plot he enacts, Prospero is heavily

invested in a successful and conclusive ending to his scheme, an investment that would be threatened by an acknowledgement of the indebtedness he himself accumulates through the use and abuse he inflicts upon those sharing the isle with him. His understanding of this fact is illustrated at the opening of Act 4, when he tells Ferdinand “If I have too austere punished you, / Your compensation makes amends, for I / Have given you here a third of mine own life” (4.1.1-3). Prospero refuses to be beholden to anyone, and this refusal most frequently takes the form of the selective remembrance that veils his own debts and violences while obsessively reminding others of their own. Prospero is fixated on amends, on enforcing a reconciliation that will put the errors of the past to rest and bring his efforts to a definitive close. The moral missteps he himself falls into in acquiring this reconciliation must, then, be whitewashed, and he ensures that this veiling of his own violences is achieved by being strategic about how the past is recounted when he compels it to be.

Ariel, as Prospero’s closest servant, is the character who spends the most time fulfilling Prospero’s need to have the imaginary past rearticulated. As illustrated by an exchange between the two that has Ariel agreeing to carry out Prospero’s commands “to th’ syllable” (2.1.505), Ariel sees and takes advantage of Prospero’s compulsive dependence on repetition, be it through a command that must be exactly recapitulated or though his incessant concern with the imagined forgetfulness of those in his thrall.<sup>2</sup> Ariel, however, does not repeat, he reiterates, and by so doing reveals the ethical nature of reiterative praxis itself.<sup>3</sup> His reiterative utterances become likeness with a difference, undergoing a transformation that retains the seeming intent of the originary command while imbuing enough ethically oriented difference to mobilize its rearticulation and

unsettle the futurist trajectory of its original aim. Ariel, singing to Ferdinand in Act 1, Scene 2, encapsulates the reiterative and transformative quality he deploys throughout the course of the text to offer an ethical counter to the “rough[ness]” (5.1.50) of Prospero’s commemorative demands: “Nothing of him that doth fade / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange” (1.2.403-405). Throughout the text, Ariel carries out his commands as he must, but his repetition becomes reiteration, or repetition with a “sea-change” (1.2.404). In making his commands rich, strange, and radically indeterminate, Ariel takes Prospero’s will to re-memory and holds it accountable for the violences it attempts to veil, opening up the temporal permeability a queer ethic necessitates and assuring that Prospero’s fantasy of a reconciled and static world is unveiled as an impossible one.

#### “NOW DOES MY PROJECT GATHER TO A HEAD”: PROSPERO, FUTURITY, AND THE NARRATIVE VIOLENCE OF RE-MEMORY

Prospero’s investment in an ending is asserted once more in the opening line of the closing act of the play, in which he tells Ariel: “Now does my project gather to a head” (5.1.1). Prospero has at this point achieved just about all he has set out to do from the beginning. Antonio and his men are fully frozen in his thrall, and he is prepared to move on to the final, purging punishment that will seemingly restore the peace and unity that Antonio’s originary crime undid. “Shortly shall all my labours end” (4.1.61); “Now does my project gather to a head” (5.1.1): the rhetoric of near completion that Prospero utilizes illustrates the reality of the end goal that he seeks. It is not revenge that Prospero here privileges or makes reference to, but the closure and fulfillment that this revenge

will bring about. With Antonio and his men now literally fixed in place, Prospero prepares to inflict the punishment that will act as a reconciling conclusion to both his plot and the injustices of the past at large. The telos that Prospero anticipates will petrify all that came before it, catalyzing a return to an Imaginary past free of violences, debts, and the temporizing need to make either punishing or compensatory amends for all such charges. This completed future resonates with Lee Edelman's notion of futurity, which similarly "marks the impossible place of an Imaginary past exempt from the deferrals intrinsic to the future and projected ahead as the site at which being and meaning are joined as One" (Edelman 10). It is this stasis that Prospero anticipates and puts so much effort into achieving: the stasis that necessarily accompanies a telos, an ending, or a close. By striving toward a petrification of temporality that unifies an illusorily perfected past with an identically sealed-off future, Prospero desires the stagnation of history itself, stripped of the porousness that accountability demands.

The question of retrospection in the play has received a lot of critical attention.<sup>4</sup> Paul Brown has noted the ways in which Prospero utilizes enforced remembrance to interpolate those around him, asserting that "a remembrance of things past [is] soon revealed as a mnemonic of power" (Brown 59). Evelyn Tribble similarly posits that "Prospero figures himself as the sole retainer of the past" (Tribble 156). That Prospero deploys his version of the past as a reification of control is clear. The relationship this narrative of re-memory has to his futurist conceptions of history in general remains unquestioned, however, and I would like to examine how Prospero's remembrance functions specifically as an imposition of both social and temporal death. I posit that Prospero's enmeshment of social and temporal stasis is played out most discernibly

through the space of Alonso's illusorily drowned body that he forces Ariel to recount in Act 1, Scene 2. Having Ariel perform a song for Ferdinand that alerts him of his father's death while simultaneously commemorating said death, Prospero unwittingly reveals the three major processes he enacts to bolster the efficacy of his project: firstly, his reliance on imposing dead citizenship upon those around him that renders them confined but still useful for his purposes; secondly, the manner in which he attempts to veil the violences of this enforced death; and, finally, his particular configuration of remembrance as that which seeks to entomb, put to rest, and close off the past.

Alonso, symbolically killed and remembered only so Prospero can ensure Ferdinand's compliance with his plot, captures the simultaneous death and functionality Prospero makes full use of. Prospero seeks to objectify and rigidify the subjectivities of those in his thrall so that he may ensure their utter confinement while still rendering them capable of proving useful to his project. The figurative death that this entails leaves all the inhabitants of the isle rigidified within what Lauren Berlant aptly terms dead citizenship. As she writes in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, this citizenship is characterized as dead by signifying "identities not live, or in play, but dead, frozen, fixed, and at rest" (Berlant 60). Prospero's figurative killing of Alonso emblemizes the particular type of death he inflicts upon those around him throughout the play. As with Alonso, these are not literal murders but rather symbolic deaths that engender a fixed confinement that leaves them objectified and thus passive components of Prospero's plot. Their deaths rigidify them so that they are still functional and useful to Prospero while conveniently incapable of the kind of movement that would hinder the careful machinations of his plot. This confined functionality keeps Ariel, Caliban, and

Alonso rooted in the place that serves Prospero's ends the best. The image of Alonso's corpse here evoked is thus particularly significant: it embodies the nonliteral but nonetheless mortifying mode of death that Prospero relies so heavily upon.

In Act 4, Prospero reminds Ferdinand that "If I have too austere punished you, / Your compensation makes amends" (4.1.1-2). Though he refers there to the prize of Miranda, Ferdinand is offered commemorative compensation in the musically delivered news of his father's death as well. "The ditty does remember my drowned father," (1.2.409-410), Ferdinand observes, "Allaying...my passion / With its sweet air" (1.2.395-396). That Prospero can be seen to make two attempts to reconcile his dynamic with Ferdinand reveals much about the valences of his project. Ferdinand, innocent in so far as he has himself done Prospero no wrong, cannot justifiably merit the punishment that Prospero asserts the others on the isle deserve.<sup>5</sup> Prospero ordinarily deploys remembrance to validate the violence of his actions and thus deny their violence at all. He must here, however, find other ways to resist accumulating a debt of any kind to Ferdinand so that he will not be left with anything to make amends for himself after his revenge plot has reached the definitive end he plans for it. The allaying comfort offered Ferdinand becomes the means through which he here renders remembrance as that which will rid him of any and all accountability: commemoration becomes compensatory, and as he will later assert with the 'gift' of Miranda, this compensation is meant to right any wrongs Prospero's "austere punish[ment]" (4.1.1) may have opened up.<sup>6</sup> As soon as there is debt, there is movement: to be held accountable for something is to acknowledge imperfectability and incompleteness. This move to avoid the debt that his administration of



social death might otherwise create is a move he deploys throughout, and it serves to make the telos of reconciled completion possible.

The commemorative remembrance Prospero offers Alonso ultimately works to ensure stasis in another, more sweeping way as well. De Certeau discusses the perils of such remembrance in *The Writing of History*:

Alphonse Dupront has said, “The sole historical quest for ‘meaning’ remains indeed a quest for the Other,” but, however contradictory it may be, this project aims at “understanding” and, through “meaning,” at hiding the alterity of the foreigner; or, in what amounts to the same thing, it aims at calming the dead who still haunt the present, and at offering them scriptural tombs. (de Certeau 2)

The risk of ‘calming’ the dead here identified is the risk of silencing them, of alleviating the ethical imperative to the past that they would otherwise demand. This means of commemoration offers a burial that, ironically, facilitates remembrance only so that it can be eventually forgotten. This forgetting takes the form of an absolution of responsibility. With the entombment of the lost other of the past comes an appeasement, and this necrological model of history sees this scriptural burial as little more than a means of inciting a mourning that can eventually be completed and thus put to rest.<sup>7</sup> This is the project Prospero has in mind from the beginning: he enforces re-memory so that he may eventually freeze all need for it. The remembrance he evokes works toward a finality, and thus also toward a forgetting. He remembers Alonso and the web of violences he represents so that he can be buried, covered over, mourned, and put to rest. The figurative killing and commemorative remembering of Alonso, then, comes to symbolize the major goals of Prospero’s project at large: the social death that reshapes people into objects to be wielded; the attempt to veil the violences of that murderous imposition in order to

excavate accountability and the temporal fluidity it opens up; and the ultimate construction of a remembrance that paradoxically works toward a forgetting. All three of these processes work to fix and make static that which would otherwise resist Prospero's desire for reaching an endpoint at which history will finally stand still.

The past that Prospero constructs and demands be recounted attains its status as illusorily whole by a process of careful selection that omits details that would force reconsideration of the telos its created for. Garrett Sullivan discusses Early Modern conceptions of forgetting as "not...the erasure of knowledge...but as an action or series of actions that represents a particular disposition toward that knowledge" (Sullivan 66). This agency of choice in the process of recollection engenders a self-forgetting that fosters and justifies sinful behavior.<sup>8</sup> In demanding that sins and debts be remembered, Prospero holds others responsible for the move away from an Edenic past imagined as untainted by any such sin. Striving for a future in which all will have been forced into reconciliation and thus returned to a past free of the need for violence, it is paramount that Prospero omit the realities of his own violences lest he end up himself accountable for them and re-mobilize the temporal dynamic of such past accountability he strives to anchor and dispel.<sup>9</sup> Imagining memory as composed of different fragments of material capable of being rearranged and edited is a helpful way of approaching Prospero's selective will to re-memory, in which he obsessively reminds others of their own crimes and debts while willfully forgetting his own.<sup>10</sup>

Act 1, Scene 2 provides a generative series of exchanges that illustrate this selective process of re-memory and self-forgetting that Prospero enforces. As several critics have noted, this act has Prospero reminding Miranda, Ariel, and Caliban of past

events. The way Prospero deploys his narrative of the past to confine Ariel explicitly is a fruitful starting point. Ariel, reminding Prospero that he “promise[d] / To bate [him] a full year” (1.2.250-251), makes a request for his freedom that Prospero denies with a series of questions that force Ariel to recall the debt he owes: “Dost thou forget / From what a torment I did free thee” (1.2.252-253)? Some permutation of this question is asked of Ariel four times and Prospero’s declaration that he must “Once in a month recount what [Ariel] has been, / Which [he] forget’st” (1.2.264-265) further implies the frequency with which such exchange occurs. Prospero here clearly utilizes remembrance to stabilize the power imbalance of their relationship and thus keep Ariel firmly fixed in place. By pointing to Ariel’s past imprisonment, Prospero justifies and ensures the maintenance of his still-existing confinement. This moment functions within Prospero’s futurist narrative by justifying the terms of the present and thus ridding it of any future need to be accounted for. If Prospero’s utilization of a futurist logic functions to imagine a cohesive future free of debt that marks a return to an Imaginary past, then this fantasy is here maintained by Prospero’s willful ignorance of his own present-day crimes. Thus, he presents a narrative of the past that calcifies the possibility of a future free of the need for remembrance. This is accomplished by his forcing Ariel to recount the tale in a manner that omits Prospero’s own injustices and the debts they themselves open up. For Prospero to admit the violence inherent to his enslavement of Ariel would unsettle that simple trajectory of his project, aiming as it does for a future conclusively absolved of all such injustices. Forcing Ariel to recount a narrative of his past that forgets the moment in which Prospero re-enslaves him is the way in which Prospero compensates for the violence of that moment. “Dost thou forget / From what a torment I did free thee”

(1.2.252-253), he asks Ariel, forgetting himself the torment that he keeps him in by virtue of that very enforcement of re-memory. If Prospero's treatment of Alonso's illusorily drowned body abstractly emblemized the processes of his project, we here see him impose those processes on Ariel: he rigidifies him within a dead citizenship that leaves him functional but immobile, attempts to compensate for that figurative killing through a remembrance strategically shaped by selective forgetting, and labors toward a frozen future by dispossessing any and all accountability for these very actions.

This scene displays another means Prospero uses to both make his subjects utilizable and justify that violence. Names number among the materials Prospero is willing to forget in order to strengthen the force of his carefully edited narrative of the past. Prospero, reminding Ariel of the state Sycorax left him in, is naturally led to mention Caliban, her son, who is currently enslaved under Prospero just as Ariel is. Prospero takes three lines to express his contempt for Caliban without once using his name: "Save for the son that she did litter here, / A freckled whelp, hag-born – not honoured with / A human shape" (1.2.284-286). This moment of un-naming accomplishes two major things. Firstly, it works to strip Caliban of the basic marker of personhood that renders him something more than an object to be utilized. Prospero's tendency to rid people of their names to emphasize their objectified utility is a move he enacts on Ariel and Miranda, as well. In this scene alone, he refers to Ariel as "malignant thing" (1.2.258) and "dull thing" (1.2.288). When talking to Ferdinand in the opening scene of Act 4, Miranda is referred to as "my gift and thine own acquisition / Worthily purchased" (4.1.14-15).<sup>11</sup> Turning persons into things, and names into reified terms, is a move Prospero makes several times. By forgetting names, he conveniently forgets also

the personhood that would complicate the immobility he needs from those in his thrall, and forces others to forget it, too. Caliban's un-naming in this scene, then, works both to objectify him and to negate the violence of that objectification and its accompanying enslavement. By referring to Caliban as subhuman object, Prospero refuses to take responsibility for the subjugated position he has forced him into.<sup>12</sup> This is how Prospero's narrative of remembrance functions as a "mnemonic of power," as Paul Brown termed it (Brown 59): by presenting only the elements that render him eternally in the right and leaving out, or forgetting, all that would necessitate he eventually re-enter the temporal cycle that accountability opens up.

In the words of de Certeau, the selective narrative breakage that Prospero makes use of leaves behind "shards created by the selection of materials" that "come back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies: 'resistances,' 'survivals,' or delays discreetly perturb the pretty order of a line of 'progress' or a system of interpretation" (de Certeau 4). Prospero's self-forgotten materials, then, allow for the maintenance of a seemingly autonomous narrative that is in actuality made vulnerable by the very omitted gaps that bolster it. This vulnerability of Prospero's project has not gone unnoticed. Paul Brown notes that "the narrative is fraught because it reveals internal contradictions which strain its ostensible project and because it produces the possibility of sites of resistance in the other precisely at the moment when it seeks to impose its captivating power" (Brown 59). Kevin Ohi similarly draws attention to the impossibility of Prospero's obsessive appeals to the past, declaring "that everything in the play...must, by the displaced Duke's command, be retold or reenacted seems to compel the forgetfulness it aims to forestall" (Ohi 354). Ohi reads in this central forgetfulness of the

text the ideal space to read queerness into the play, arguing that it potentializes queer readings and histories. While I agree with the central assertion that the counterintuitive character of Prospero's remembrance marks a space in which queer interpretations of the play may be facilitated, I posit that the queer potentiality it opens up is better read through Ariel than Prospero, as it is Ariel who takes these ideological gaps and institutes a queer theoretical praxis through their shortcomings.

The fragility of Prospero's project is illustrated in the instance of the first command we see him give Ariel in Act 2, Scene 1. Line 320 marks the moment in which the order is given, and yet the pivotal utterance is omitted in favor of a stage direction indicating that he whispers something in his ear. That our only access to this original command is through Ariel's eventual execution of it points to the fragility of Prospero's control over the project he considers his. The thrust of his instruction here literally exists only insofar as Ariel performs it. This originary absence informs the interplay between the two characters from start to finish, and the assertion here that Prospero's order holds its force only through Ariel's enforced moments of repetition provides the very means through which that force is continuously unsettled by Ariel throughout.<sup>13</sup> In granting Ariel the singular power to stabilize the plot he has in mind, Prospero ignores the capacity for reiteration that Ariel utilizes instead. Ariel carries out his commands to the letter as he must, but with a difference that foregrounds that which Prospero willingly forgets in order to maintain his fantasy of autonomous stability: these forgotten remains always re-infiltrate the narrative Prospero wants to contain free of them. These remains that Ariel implicitly enforces re-memory of are Prospero's own violences. Where Prospero seeks to bring his project to a head by inflicting the final punishment that will

allow for a return to Imaginary wholeness where all sins have been purged and debts have been paid, Ariel persistently reminds him of the crimes he himself will have to pay for when all is seemingly done. This capacity to remember and remind the text of the untenability of Prospero's project is encouraged by the gaps that moments like line 320 open up. The initial moment that seemingly signifies Prospero's total control is always in some sense 'lost' to us. The fact that these moments are accessible only through Ariel's reiterative utterances both points to the untenable character of his fantasy and opens up pathways to resistance. In the absence of the originary command, perfect repetition is in fact impossible: reiteration is all that Prospero can demand.

#### "BUT DOTH SUFFER A SEA-CHANGE": ARIEL, SPECTRALITY, AND RE-MEMORY

##### REITERATED

Critical discussion concerning Ariel has been relatively scarce, especially when compared to the oft-discussed and similarly enslaved Caliban.<sup>14</sup> Holger Henke and Mary Moore have both written recently on the disruptive potential of the character, exploring the destabilizing force his presence offers the text. Henke looks to Ariel as a metatheoretical symbol for "the force of ideas that...slowly and incrementally move the course of history" (Henke 45). Mary Moore is less explicitly concerned with Ariel's resistant capacities but nonetheless renders him as that which "fracture[s] grammar, spatial, and temporal logic in ways that amaze and confound" (Moore 496).<sup>15</sup> Henke's identification of Ariel as emblematic of an anti-essentialist politics acknowledges the minute shifts he can be seen to enact throughout the course of the play. Moore's reading of Ariel as a boundary-crossing, indeterminate figure similarly begins to imagine his

capacity to fragment the general notion of stability so essential to Prospero's plot. Both critics ultimately shift the bulk of their analytic focus elsewhere, however, and in this paper I seek to take on an interrogation of the specific ways his creative, spectral servitude leaves its mark upon the play. This task hinges on the interplay between Prospero's remembrance-as-death and Ariel's remembrance-as-resistance, and as such I will now be returning to the textual moments already examined in order to illustrate the ways in which Ariel responds to and resists Prospero's project.

Ariel significantly carries out the rendering of Alonso's body in Act 1, Scene 2 at Prospero's command. The latter half of the song he performs to accomplish this captures the reiterative and transformative quality he deploys throughout the text to render mobile that which Prospero seeks to fix:

Full fathom five thy father lies.  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes;  
Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange. (1.2.400-406)

There are several things about this textual moment that I would like to engage from Ariel's end. I want to look first at how it emblemizes the reiterative praxis Ariel uses throughout. From there, I want to examine the ethical and commemorative force this praxis facilitates, before positing the ways in which this commemorative move evades the closure of entombment that allows for the illusion of finality and thus stability. I propose that this moment encapsulates the reiterative ethic Ariel deploys to keep subjectivities and the temporal trajectory they are enmeshed within fluid, mobile, and insistent on a remembrance that demands accountability rather than retribution. This scene, then, reveals the counter-processes that Ariel utilizes to fragment the force of Prospero's



narrative. Where Prospero sought to assert death and a compensatory forgetting, Ariel reiteratively foregrounds spectrality and a remembrance that actively resists the equalizing force of any compensatory effort.

The transformation of Alonso's body that Ariel here mobilizes exemplifies the poetic praxis he uses throughout the text. This praxis, reiterative and seemingly subservient in nature, works to unsettle the force of Prospero's order even as it acts it out. The presentation of the slain body reveals the particular form that Prospero's violence takes, and in describing it as nonfading but as undergoing transformation, Ariel describes also the tactic he puts to use in order to undermine said violence: the will of Prospero does not fade in the execution of his commands, but rather undergoes a metamorphic change that diminishes its paralyzing intention. Ariel repeats with a "sea-change" (1.2.404) that produces an indeterminacy that denies the immutability Prospero desires. This ethic of indeterminacy resists the fixity that characterizes Prospero's infliction of death. Alonso as rendered by Ariel is not confined, static, or lost, but capable of a transformation that, in making him strange, grants him the material ambiguity that keeps him in play. Rather than being anchored underwater, dead and immobilized, Alonso undergoes transformation into something more than a corpse to be mourned, forgotten, and put aside. Where Prospero wants him turned to stone, Ariel turns him to coral, ornamental but also live.

Ariel's persistence on unfinished indeterminacy resonates with what Carla Freccero calls queer spectrality. The figure of the specter, collapsing boundaries between absence/presence, living/dead, and past/present, is fittingly emblematic of the mobile subjectivity a queer praxis calls for. It is also central to a way of thinking history, and it is

in this image of the specter that the boundary between even the living and figuratively dead ultimately collapses. The existence of the ghost, as a material trace of the violent past, necessitates that we be held accountable for that past. As Freccero explains, “[the] willingness to be haunted is an ethical relation to the world, motivated by a concern not only for the past but also for the future, for those who live in the borderlands without a home” (Freccero 75). The significance of maintaining the syncretic existence of these borderlands is itself the ethical payoff of this spectral approach, because the refusal to stabilize categorical definitions is one of the means through which these subjectivities are kept, to borrow from Berlant once more, live and in play rather than dead and at rest. Freccero’s assertion of a spectral approach to the dead foregrounds the significance of a haunting that resists stable anchors of identity and meaning. What must be imagined, she argues, is an approach to history “that would neither ‘forget the dead’ nor ‘successfully’ mourn them” (Freccero 78). For mourning to be successful would be itself a forgetting, or a closing-off of the past that absolves one from being held accountable to it. A queer responsibility necessitates remaining open and receptive to the violences of the past, keeping its dead not buried but aggressively present even in their absence. Ariel manages exactly this in his rendering of Alonso’s body. He offers a moment of remembrance that commemorates but avoids the risk of anchoring Alonso by presenting not a corpse but a body in flux. Rather than putting him properly at rest, Ariel grants Alonso a ghostly and mobile subjectivity that is strange and unpalatable rather than easily digestible and thus appropriable. With this strangeness comes a categorical indeterminacy that spurns the possibility of confining the dead within a grave that diminishes their residual ability to haunt. If the danger de Certeau and Freccero recognize in a necrological model of history

is its tendency to hide the alterity of the dead other, Ariel instead highlights this very alterity by characterizing Alonso's body as peculiar and thus emblematic of the transformative capacity for strangeness and unlikeness that characterizes spectrality itself.

Ariel's treatment of Alonso's body responds to Prospero's in three major ways, then. Firstly, it counters the social death he imposes by granting Alonso a reiterative capacity for transformation that undercuts the immobility Prospero wants of him. Secondly, it resists a compensatory forgetting by rendering Alonso as something strange and thus characterized by an inconsumable residue that possesses a spectral effect and refuses clean or easy mourning. Finally, this spectrality demands an approach to history that denies all equalizing or reconciling measures: despite Prospero's best efforts to make and enforce amends, the materials he seeks to bury and forget will always come back to haunt him. Try as he might to make history and all those around him stand still so he may reach a peaceful end, Ariel ensures he is continuously reminded of the residual traces of all the violences that he still must answer for. Where this interchange of remembrance-as-death and remembrance-as-resistance plays out abstractly on the symbolic space of Alonso's poeticized body, I'd like to turn now to the ways in which it marks noticeable shifts in the trajectory of the text. This is achieved most powerfully through the reiterative interruptions Ariel enacts in his exchange with Prospero in Act 2, Scene 1.

Prospero's interrogative reminders of Ariel's past imprisonment in this scene function to justify the position he currently keeps him in: "I must / Once in a month recount what thou has been, / Which thou forget'st" (2.1.263-265). Prospero makes several demands that Ariel himself speak the narrative so he may better remember. Prospero, by demanding throughout this scene that Ariel repeatedly acknowledge the

reality of the story being retold, unwittingly provides Ariel the means to reveal the gaps in Prospero's presentation of the narrative.<sup>16</sup> Throughout this exchange, Ariel points to the violences Prospero is omitting when speaking of Sycorax's own injustices. As Prospero picks up on when noting that Ariel reported himself as Prospero's slave (1.2.272-273), Ariel makes repeated reference to his own degraded subject position. By so doing, he actively derails the narrative of kindness and debt that Prospero is positing as justification for his position as master. Where he before reports himself as slave in a less pointed manner, with references to Prospero as "great master" (1.2.190) or "*my* master" (emphasis mine, 1.2.217), he switches to the unadorned bluntness of naming Prospero simply "master" as soon as Prospero tells the story of Ariel's prior imprisonment. Responding to Prospero's tale of supposedly freeing him with "I thank thee, master" (1.2.295) points to the still-radical unfreedom Prospero has left him suspended within yet tries to cover up. Though reiterating and affirming Prospero's story as demanded of him, Ariel's pointed references to himself as servant bring to the fore the reality of the dynamic between the two characters that Prospero seems eager to veil. Prospero wants to remind Ariel of the debt he owes him for 'freeing' him while ignoring the debt he himself acquired by immediately re-confining him.<sup>17</sup> Punctuating every seemingly affirmative utterance with the word "master" both opens up a demand for accountability that shatters Prospero's self-righteous narrative and likens the confined torment Ariel experienced in the pine tree to his current subject position. With each iteration of the word "master" Ariel highlights the imprisonment he remains within, Sycorax or no. By here reiterating the status of slave that Prospero has imposed upon him, Ariel discovers and utilizes a

resistant agency that allows him to subtly deepen the cracks in Prospero's untenable narrative while still appearing compliant with the demands for validation made of him.

The disruption Ariel accomplishes by way of reiteration is even more blatantly spelled out at another instance of this same scene. Prospero's discussion of Sycorax brings him to make reference to Caliban who is, like Ariel, under Prospero's command. Prospero here strips Caliban of his name, as previously discussed. Immediately following Prospero's reference to Caliban as "A freckled whelp, hag-born – Not honoured with / A human shape" (1.2.285-286), Ariel interrupts to affirm this assertion of fact with a key difference: "Yes, Caliban her son," he states (1.2.287). Prospero, who has required that Ariel repeat him throughout this scene, here bizarrely condemns Ariel for doing just that, expressing anger over Ariel interrupting him to seemingly add nothing of value to the dialogue (1.2.288). That Prospero fails to see the difference in what he and Ariel vocalized reveals an inability on his part to distinguish between exact repetition and reiteration. Ariel's interjection here is, significantly, the first utterance of Caliban's name in the play, and although Prospero claims the response was a pointless one, he then himself goes on to refer to Caliban by name as well. Ariel's reiterative interruption brings Caliban's name into the text, doing him the decency of being referred to as something other than "a freckled whelp, hag-born" (1.2.285).<sup>18</sup> This is a resistant move, for both Caliban and for Ariel himself.<sup>19</sup> Ariel interrupts a rant that validates the terms of his own imprisonment to remind Prospero that his other servant has a name. Where Prospero justified Ariel's enslavement by reminding him that he freed him from the tree he was trapped within, he here also justifies Caliban's by making detailed reference to his perceived status as subhuman. By enforcing remembrance of Caliban's name, Ariel once

more draws attention to the materials Prospero is willing to forget in order to fortify his self-righteous position. What Prospero opts to forget here is his imprisonment of Caliban and the barbaric nature of that confinement, a forgetting that he incites by forgetting his name and the personhood attached to it. Prospero attempts to absolve himself of all accountability for this action by rendering Caliban a nameless, inhuman figure whose servitude is thus naturally warranted, but Ariel's seemingly repetitive and affirmative intervention functions to assert the very personhood that Prospero willfully forgets. The charges against Caliban that Prospero's injurious declarations here convey are immediately undercut by Ariel's interruption, and Ariel's ethic can be seen to emerge in a manner so craftily that Prospero both fails to recognize it and falls prey to its machinations. Ariel's reminder here that the so-called "freckled whelp" (1.2.285) has a name bears the trace of a polemic against Prospero that inevitably colors every hateful utterance of the name thereafter.<sup>20</sup> This seemingly minimal shift that Ariel rouses in the trajectory of the text is perhaps one of the reasons why Caliban so generously refers to Ariel as "a harmless fairy" (4.1.196), and why he recognizes that Ariel does "hate [Prospero] / As rootedly as [he]" (3.2.89-90) where so many critics do not.<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The ethical significance of a mourning unfinished, a finality forever deferred, is one central to the closing acts of *The Tempest*. Act 3, Scene 3 sees Ariel finally encountering Antonio and his men on Prospero's behalf. Remembrance has a key role to play in this confrontational moment:

But remember,  
For that's my business to you, that you three

From Milan did supplant good Prospero;  
Exposed unto the sea, which hath requit it,  
Him and his innocent child; for which foul deed  
The powers, delaying not forgetting, have  
Incensed the sea and shores, yea, all the creatures,  
Against your peace. (3.3.68-75)

Prospero is overjoyed by the display, congratulating Ariel on the perfection of his repetition when he states “Of my instruction hast thou nothing bated / In what thou hadst to say” (3.3.85-86). It seems at first as though Ariel’s utilization of remembrance is in this moment uncharacteristically in accord with Prospero’s own. His trademark reiterative difference initially seems absent, and he acts as the primary agent of a petrifying action here: as he later relays to Prospero, this encounter leaves the men confined together and incapable of budging until Prospero decides to release them (5.1.8-11). This moment of petrification, rendered in literal terms, is at odds with the mobilization Ariel has sought to catalyze throughout the play. What, then, can Ariel be said to achieve in this scene? I posit that this speech is in fact disrupted by a crucial moment of reiterative performance that can be found in lines 73-74, in which Ariel declares that the powers have delayed rather than forgotten the punishment owed for the exile of Prospero. This conception of a final punishment delayed is central to Ariel’s actions in the latter half of the play, for Ariel’s strategic deferring of any kind of final reconciliation is the way in which he mobilizes the historical past itself by refusing to allow it to ever reach a state of peaceful closure. Prospero views this scene as the moment that allows his project to “gather to a head” (5.1.1). As he has made clear throughout, what he ultimately seeks is completion, an end. He has sought to bring the cycle of violence that has characterized his relationship to Antonio to an end by preparing a final, stabilizing punishment that will put the whole affair at rest. Ariel, fragmenting the

seemingly perfect repetition of his speech to Antonio and his men by privileging the power of delay, foregrounds a deferral that recognizes a push against finality as more ethically generative than a project of revenge completed. “Ling’ring perdition,” he states, is “worse than any death” (3.3.77). The stasis that death allows is an insufficient end, and it is in removing the possibility of any such reconciled ending that Ariel finds value. Antonio must remain forever accountable for his crimes, and it is in enforcing this endless accountability that the major thrust of Ariel’s ethic emerges. The violences of the past cannot be compensated for, buried, and put out of mind. They must, as Ariel articulates, “step by step attend / You and your ways” (3.3.78-79). The punishment this scene promises is undercut by this forceful articulation of the necessity of its delay, and Ariel here sets the stage in a manner that will later allow him to ensure this delay persists indefinitely.

This delay of punishment culminates in the closing act of the play, courtesy of Ariel. Act 5, Scene 1 illustrates a final moment in which Prospero’s will to repetition becomes the means through which Ariel fragments the futurist trajectory of his narrative. The scene tellingly opens with Prospero prepared for his project to “gather to a head” (5.1.1) and he spends his opening lines obsessing over the details necessary to ensure its perfection. Prospero, eager to see his plot come to its close, again demonstrates the role his enforced re-memory has to play in achieving the death-like stasis he anticipates. The exchange with Ariel that follows, however, utterly disrupts this planned move toward completion. Prospero, asking Ariel to repeat the states Antonio and his followers were left in, seeks re-confirmation that Antonio and his men are confined and ready to be worked upon. Prospero demands that their stricken plights be restated for him, wanting



himself to remember and thus cement this final piece of his plot. Ariel, noting that they remain in the same, stuck state he left them in, draws attention to the desire for repetition Prospero's request elicits. He also takes full advantage of this opportunity to reiterate and disrupt, as he has throughout. In discursively replicating the scene for Prospero again, Ariel renders it sympathetically. Prospero is met with an illustration of their state that reveals the violence that led to it. By reiterating the reality of their dire straits, Ariel imbues a difference that fully implicates Prospero for his violent role in its construction. Ariel rearticulates the scene to evoke the fact of Prospero's own involvement, and by so doing opens up the space of responsibility that fosters its transmutation. Already, as he re-performs the scene for Prospero, he is mobilizing it, rendering its desolate, literal fixity in terms that open up the complex web of debts that Prospero wants closed off. The image of Gonzalo in particular, "tears run[ning] down his beard like winter's drops / From eaves of reeds" (5.1.10-11), is a strategically placed one on Ariel's part. The focus on Gonzalo serves as an implicit reminder of the "gentleness" (1.2.166) and "charity" (1.2.163) Gonzalo showed Prospero upon his exile from Milan. The reiterative nature of this instance of re-memory is made explicit when Ariel reminds Prospero of what he has said about Gonzalo in the past: "Him that you termed, sir, the good lord Gonzalo" (5.1.15). Rearticulating Prospero's past descriptions of Gonzalo back at him functions as a reminder of a debt. In addition to necessitating accountability for the state he has left Antonio and his men in, he is accountable also for the goodwill he was shown in the past and seems all too eager to suddenly forget. This remembrance that Ariel evokes is used here not to catalyze a punishment but a reminder of mutual and un-reconcilable

responsibility that strips the revenge trope of its end and leaves all parties accountable for their actions by virtue of that very endlessness.

Prospero's decision to release Antonio and his men utterly disrupts the arc he's had in mind since the beginning. In addition to Ariel's sympathetic re-rendering of the states of the king and his men, his assertion that Prospero's affections would become tender if he himself looked upon it has a particularly moving effect on Prospero. He responds to this claim by asking Ariel his first non-rhetorical question, or the first question that doesn't act also as a demand or reminder of servitude: "Dost thou think so, spirit" (5.1.19)?<sup>22</sup> This question, like most of the questions Prospero asks, does demand an act of repetition on Ariel's part, but a repetition of a markedly different sort. Ariel, given the chance to repeat himself rather than Prospero, is allowed an agency in this moment more explicit than any he's been given at any other point of the play thus far. Ariel here manages to unstick Prospero from the predictable finality of his revenge plot. Where Prospero's questions have before been uttered as a means of ensuring said plot and all its minute machinations move forward with no unpredictability, he here asks of Ariel a genuine question that unsettles the trajectory of his arc and the imagined cohesion it seeks to regain and re-establish. Prospero goes on from here to famously conclude that "the rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance" (5.1.27-28), and asks Ariel to release them. It is Ariel's reiterative ethic that brings about this pivotal shift in the play's action, and it is here that the efficacy of his praxis is fully realized as he manages to secure release for himself and all the others under Prospero's enthrallment.

Ariel responds to Prospero's question about softening affections by saying "Mine would, sir, were I human" (5.1.20). That Ariel persuades Prospero to shift the course of

his plan by drawing attention to Ariel's status as non-human is telling. Prospero's act of forgiveness is here made possible through Ariel's articulation of his own inability to feel or forgive. Given the push against finality that I have argued Ariel strives for throughout the play, it is worth considering Derrida's conception of forgiveness here. Derrida argues that forgiveness is only genuine when it is not functioning to establish any kind of finality. Forgiveness for Derrida cannot be normative or normalizing, and "should remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible as if it interrupted the ordinary course of history" (Derrida 32). The logic of exchange and reconciliation so entrenched within all normative models of forgiveness renders it false or impure. The only way to achieve a forgiveness that unsettles the counter intuitively violent logic of finality is to find a way that disentangles it from a reconciliation that seeks to restore some imagined order of things. Embracing the aporia necessarily inherent to his imagining of such forgiveness, Derrida states "forgiveness must announce itself as impossibility itself" (Derrida 33). The forgiveness that Ariel catalyzes in Act 5, Scene 1 is non-normalizing. It is facilitated from such a space of impossibility: his statement "mine would, sir, were I human" (5.1.20) is an aporetic utterance, conveying the paradox of a figure not human proving himself more capable of human emotions than Prospero himself. The terms of Ariel's release have already been decided and he has nothing to gain from prodding Prospero toward "virtue" (5.1.28) here. The forgiveness that Ariel brings into the play has no discernible telos other than to delay the telos that Prospero's project has itself been working up to. By urging Prospero to forgive, Ariel delays the punishment that would foster reconciliation.<sup>23</sup> Ariel's forgiveness works to defer rather than to finalize, and by so doing mobilizes the mutual accountability that keeps the past

and future porous and radically un-anchored. As Ariel himself articulated in Act 3, Scene 3, delaying is not forgetting. In fact, the only way to effectively not forget, to avoid the “successful” mourning Freccero warned of, is to delay the act of punishment that would allow for the illusion of a stabilizing absolution. This delay takes the form of a moment of extraordinary forgiveness in the closing act of *The Tempest*, and Ariel’s rendering of forgiveness as deferral keeps it from adhering to the conclusiveness that would undercut the telos-defying aim of his project.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* asserts that a queer politic "insists...on the impossibility of Symbolic closure" (Edelman 48). Several queer theorists have similarly engaged the question of queer temporality and its refusal of teleology: Judith Halberstam in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Jonathan Goldberg in "Queering History," and Carla Freccero in *Queer/Early/Modern*, among others.

<sup>2</sup> As Judith Butler writes in *Excitable Speech*, "agency begins where sovereignty wanes" (Butler 16). Prospero's sovereignty wanes precisely through his compulsive need to have his particular interpretation of the past repeatedly asserted.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler reminds us, "reiterations are never simply replicas of the same" (Butler 226).

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Orgel discusses retrospection within the play and its close attention to "recounting and re-enacting past action [and] evoking and educating the memory" (Orgel 5). From there, Jane Wilkinson, Dympna Callaghan, and Jonathan Baldo have all examined the interplay between memory and colonialism throughout the text.

<sup>5</sup> It is telling that Ferdinand, as a white male who is "the best of them that speak this speech" (4.1.433), is the only person Prospero seems eager to ensure he is not indebted to. He justifies his treatment of Antonio and his men by remembering their exiling him, his treatment of Caliban by pointing to his subhuman status, and his treatment of Ariel by reminding him of the debt he owes him. Ferdinand, as the only person Prospero genuinely fears being held accountable to, is the only figure Prospero recognizes as a genuine threat to his project. He thus makes attempts to compensate for his undue punishment of him in ways he doesn't offer other characters.

<sup>6</sup> Treating Miranda as a 'gift' to be won is of course another example of the utilizable objectification Prospero imposes upon those around him. For more on Miranda's role to play in Prospero's attempt to regain sovereign stability, see Melissa E. Sanchez's "Seduction and Service in 'The Tempest.'"

<sup>7</sup> The phrase "necrological model of history" comes from Carla Freccero's reading of de Certeau in *Queer/Early/Modern* (Freccero 70).

<sup>8</sup> Sullivan makes these claims in the context of specifically salvational knowledge and *Dr. Faustus*. This link between salvation and memory is drawn from John Donne's 1618 sermon that argued "the art of *salvation*, is but the art of *memory*" (Donne, qtd by Sullivan 67).

<sup>9</sup> Sullivan refers to this as 'self-forgetting,' referencing the Puritan divine Paul Baynes, who asks "What makes men sweare, bowze, give place to their lusts, goe on in hardnesse

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of heart?” and answers, “it is forgetting themselves, and never once considering what they doe, and how they goe on” (Baynes, qtd by Sullivan 66)

<sup>10</sup> This selective recollection was informed by the logic of medieval memory training and the influence it still held in the Renaissance. Mary Carruthers describes this process of memory training as being centered around “the fundamental principle...to ‘divide’ the material to be remembered into pieces short enough to be recalled in single units and to key these into some sort of rigid, easily reconstructable order” (Carruthers 155).

<sup>11</sup> Orlando Patterson writes, “the changing of a name is almost universally a symbolic act of stripping a person of his former identity” (Patterson 55).

<sup>12</sup> As Prospero tells Miranda, he cannot do without him, as he makes their fire, fetches wood, and generally “serves in offices / That profit us” (1.2.315-316).

<sup>13</sup> Where Prospero wants speech-acts, he can only ever see results through Ariel’s response. For more on speech-acts, see J.L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words*.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Bate has asserted, “we have gone quite a long way towards recognizing the rights of Caliban...next we will need to set Ariel free” (Bate 162). Ariel has frequently been read as narrowly self-interested and politically ineffectual.

<sup>15</sup> Moore takes Ariel’s declaration of “I flamed amazement” (1.2.197) and reads in it a marvel of poetic language that makes reality (and ‘matter’) fluid and tractable: “‘I flamed’ means that Ariel emits or is flames, which in the normal order of things would consume him...his very narration, however, proves his survival, evoking wonder through the utterance itself” (Moore 496). The amazement Ariel evokes emerges specifically through his “play in and with language and matter throughout the play” (Moore 467). Moore posits that Ariel mimics the power of theatre itself in “fractur[ing] grammar and logic, blurring boundaries between things and acts” (Moore 502).

<sup>16</sup> Critics have noted that Prospero must have originally gotten the Sycorax narrative from Ariel in the first place. Ariel’s affirmation of Prospero’s version of it has been read as an utter submission on his part. Evelyn Tribble, for example, argues Ariel is here “figured as a non-participant in his own story” (Tribble 159). These claims ignore the ways in which Ariel subtly deploys resistance in his seeming submission to Prospero’s version of the past.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Brown notes: “What is really at issue is the underlining of a power relation. Ariel is, paradoxically, *bound* in service by this constant reminder of Prospero’s gift of *freedom* to him, in releasing him from imprisonment in a tree” (Brown 60). He ultimately reads the scene as a moment in which Ariel consents to his subjugation, however (61).

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<sup>18</sup> See Julia Reinhard Lupton's "Creature Caliban" for a reading that characterizes Caliban as himself a disruptive figure by way of the bodily indeterminacy Prospero here uses as reason to imprison him.

<sup>19</sup> I do not intend to undermine the resistance that Caliban effectively performs for himself throughout the play, which has already been explored by Paul Brown, Roberto Fernández Retamar, and several other critics who have detailed the colonial dynamic between Prospero and Caliban.

<sup>20</sup> The significance of Ariel bringing Caliban's name into the text is further made apparent when examining the intertextual echo of Montaigne's "Of Cannibals" that his name contains. The act of uttering Caliban's name in and of itself reifies a certain personhood for him, an assertion that is only strengthened by this evocation of "Of Cannibals" that his name kindles. Montaigne's notion of the nobility of the savage, however misguidedly rendered, nonetheless counters the ideals of men like Prospero.

<sup>21</sup> Caliban's affinity with the spirits (Ariel included) is expressed at multiple points throughout the play. I point this out because the critical tradition surrounding *The Tempest* has tended to dichotomize Caliban and Ariel when considering them as "symbols for a reorientation of...culture" (Millán-Zaibert 152). While the play offers little in the way of explicit dialogic exchange between Ariel and Caliban, the manner in which they engage the other reveals, I think, a certain affinity between the two that is unacknowledged when they are critically positioned as at odds with one another.

<sup>22</sup> An observation made by Sarah Beckwith in her book *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, who highlights this exchange as a moment in which Ariel "tutors Prospero in how to be human, how to be kind" (Beckwith 149).

<sup>23</sup> Evelyn Tribble notes that the play closes with full reconciliation never being fully achieved (Tribble 164) and, as Stephen Orgel argues, "the point is not only that Antonio does not repent here, he is also not *allowed* to repent" (Orgel 241).

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